

# Enter the Kingdom

by Chip Brogden

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*The Kingdom of God is a present reality where Christ has the preeminence as All in All, and it is difficult to enter because the conditions are more narrow and more profound than we have been taught.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:20, Matthew 7:14, Matthew 18:1, Mark 10:23, Mark 10:26, Luke 13:23, John 3:3, John 10:9, John 14:5, Acts 14:22, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 2:6, Hebrews 3:19

**Topics:** "Kingdom Living", "True Salvation"

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## Description

Chip Brogden preaches about the challenging and narrow path to entering the Kingdom of God, emphasizing the need for true salvation beyond easy-believism. He highlights the importance of being born again, doing the Father's will, humbling oneself like a child, surpassing the righteousness of the Pharisees, enduring tribulation, avoiding unbelief and disobedience, and letting go of self, especially for the wealthy. Brogden stresses that entering the Kingdom is impossible with man, but possible with God through Jesus Christ as the Narrow Gate and the Narrow Path.

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## Transcript

"Someone asked, 'Lord, will only a few be saved?' Jesus answered, 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow gate, because I tell you this: many will try to enter but will not be able to... For narrow is the gate, and narrow is the path which leads to Life, and few will find it (Luke 13:23,24; Matthew 7:14).'"

We live in a day of easy-believism. According to the way today's church operates, it is very easy to be saved. All we have to do is make a confession, or repeat a prayer, or make a decision, or respond to an altar call. What is more, every day we hear reports of hundreds or thousands of people being "saved" in crusades and evangelistic meetings around the world. We are being told to prepare for a great last days harvest of souls which will proceed the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since it is easy to become a Christian, it is even easier to remain one. So long as we do not recant our original confession, we believe, all is well. Once we have "prayed the prayer" we are Christians. Particularly if we attend church services, read the Bible, witness, give, and obey the Ten Commandments. But, we are told, those things have nothing to do with salvation - having entered in, we are safe and secure. According to the way we have been taught it is the easiest thing in the world to become a Christian, and once your name is on the roll it is difficult, if not impossible, to have your name erased.

We are not debating if you can have your salvation and lose it - we are questioning whether these "easy believers" ever found real salvation at all. It is a foundational issue of eternal significance. In stark contrast to the conditions which exist in our day, Jesus frankly tells us that few will be saved, and few will find Life. When we read what Jesus Himself has to say we have to come to the conclusion that some within Organized Religion are guilty of trying to make the narrow gate and the narrow path into the wide gate and the wide path. We have become excellent salespeople and know how to use our powers of persuasion. We have become good at arguing our viewpoints. We are skilled at manipulating the emotions of other people. Those who know how can lead many people to the Lord - at least, according to the outward appearance.

It behooves us to go back to what the Lord Himself says, and we believe we have found at least seven occurrences in the Scriptures (beyond the two cited above) which seem to indicate that the way to Life is anything but easy. By the time we are concluded with our examination we will understand why Jesus says few are able to enter into the Kingdom. In the first place, the Kingdom is more profound than we have been taught. In the second place, the Way which leads us into the Kingdom is more narrow than we have been taught. By the grace of God let us ask the Lord enlighten us so that we will not go on deceiving or being deceived.

1. Unless you are born-again, you cannot enter.

"I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God... unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3,5)."

All of us are familiar with these verses, but we are not so familiar with what they actually mean. To state it simply, being born-again is not the goal, but the first step towards the goal: the goal is the Kingdom of God. We could state it like this: the narrow gate is not the goal, but it is the first thing we must pass through in order to enter the narrow path. Our goal, and God's goal, is not the gate, or we would not need a path. Though we begin our journey by entering the gate, the goal is at the end of the path, not at the beginning of the path. So what is the goal?

"It is God's will for all men to be saved [narrow gate] and to come to the full-knowledge of Truth [narrow path] (I Timothy 2:4)." Here we see one will of God with two expressions - a gate and a path. We enter the gate in a moment, but we walk the path over time. We are saved in a moment, but we come to the full-knowledge (epignosis) of Christ over time. So John 3:3 is not telling us about our ending, but our beginning. Birth is the beginning of Life, not the goal of Life. The goal in view here is not being born-again, but entering the Kingdom. Jesus does not just say, "You must be born again." If He did then we might be correct in saying that is all there is to it. But Jesus says, "Unless you are born again, you cannot see or enter into the Kingdom of God." It is clear that the Kingdom is what we are trying to gain entrance into, and while being born again is the gate, the ultimate destination of the Kingdom of God is at the end of the path.

So what is the Kingdom of God? Stated simply, it is where Christ has the preeminence as All in All. It is where we finally behold Him in all His fullness. To begin with this preeminence is found inwardly in the individual disciple, where it is then seen a little more visibly in the Church, from which it is eventually manifested outwardly in all of creation. This is why we lay such stress on disciples, for as the disciples go, so goes the Church. Jesus did not establish His Church until He had selected His disciples.

What is commonly preached as the "Full Gospel" might be more properly termed the "Fifty Percent Gospel." We lay such stress on the gate, on the initial coming to the Lord; but the other half of the

equation, the Kingdom and the ultimate intention of God, is hardly alluded to. What is worse, we invite sinners to Christ on the basis of their own self-serving needs (e.g., come to Christ and He will take away all your burdens, etc.). As a result, most of these people will sit just inside the gate, claiming salvation, but never enter the Kingdom, never come to the full-knowledge of Truth, and never demonstrate the preeminence of Christ over sin, self, and satan.

2. The proper confession is not enough.

"Not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the Will of my Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21)."

We began by saying that not only is the Way more narrow than we have been taught, but the Kingdom is more profound than we have been taught. For some, the Kingdom of God (alternatively known as the Kingdom of Heaven\*) is a place where Christians go when they die. In the meantime we are supposed to hold on to our faith the best we can, and if we persevere, then we will enter the Kingdom of Heaven when we leave this earth. This is an error. While to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and while there is a place called "heaven", the Kingdom of God is not up in heaven, nor is it someplace in our future. The Kingdom of God is "at hand", "has arrived", "is among you", "is within you."

So we will state it again: the Kingdom of God is where Christ has the preeminence as All in All, beginning with the individual disciple, then the Church, and ultimately, all of creation. "Thy Kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven." Obviously, the Kingdom would include heaven, but it is not heaven. Jesus tells us not to look for an outward Kingdom, or a political Kingdom, or an earthly Kingdom. "My Kingdom is not of this world... the Kingdom of God is within you." Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven when he prayed in John 17, yet He says the Kingdom is within you already. We may look up for heaven, but we look within for the Kingdom. When a Christian dies he or she does not travel to a heaven within themselves, nor do they go to live within a heaven which indwells other believers. So entering the Kingdom of God is more encompassing than going to heaven when we die.

Not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" will enter into this Kingdom. Are we saying confession is unimportant or unnecessary? God forbid! "As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will confess to God (Romans 14:11)." Yet, even if "every tongue will confess" sooner or later, it still remains that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom. It is most difficult to find a religious person who does not claim to be following Christ and does not say, "Lord, Lord". Even so, they will not enter in based solely on saying, "Lord, Lord". The text goes on to say that there are even those who can perform signs and wonders in the Name of Jesus, but the Lord does not even know who they are! Obviously this is a serious problem.

We cannot make the narrow Way more narrow than it is already, but we can certainly mislead people into believing it is wider than it really is. We dare not make it too difficult; but we should tremble at making it too easy. That is why this word must be spoken. Remember, we are not making any claims in our own name, nor are we suggesting some hidden secret we possess that others do not, nor are we establishing a system whereby we can judge the eternal destination of others. We are merely calling attention to Jesus' own words. He says few will be saved; many will try to enter but will be unable; few will enter the gate and walk the path in order to find Life. Many are called, but few are chosen.

3. Unless you become a child, you cannot enter.

"The disciples came to Jesus and wanted to know, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' So Jesus called a little child and had him stand in the midst of them. And then He said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like this little child, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So the greatest one in the Kingdom of Heaven is the one who humbles himself like this child (Matthew 18:1-4).'"

The disciples wanted to know who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. What they were really asking was, "Which one of us is the greatest?" In their question we see that they are heading in the wrong direction already. They see themselves as leaders, as kings, as lords, as heads inside this Kingdom. But Jesus seems to say, "Why do you assume that you have even entered the Kingdom? Unless you change from what you are into what this child is, you cannot even enter, so how can you claim to be the greatest?" Pride is a great stumblingblock. Proud people cannot enter the Kingdom of God. They cannot give up their own preeminence for His.

Jesus did not have to call a child over to make His point. He could have just said, "Humble yourself as a child." But He did not. So there is a significance to calling the child over and having him stand in the midst of them. Only after this was done did Jesus say, "Become like this child, or you cannot enter the Kingdom." So what is the significance? Jesus called the child, and the child responded to Jesus. There is no questioning from the child, such as, "What do You want?" or "Who are you?" Jesus had him stand in the midst of them, and again, the child complies. We do not hear him say, "Why?" or "What are you going to do now?" or "I don't have time to stand here, I want to go play."

The Lord would have given two simple instructions to the child, "Come over here" and "Stand right here". There is much we can say about being with the Lord and standing still, but we will not dissect that now. Our point is simply this: the child did what he was told. Silent, meek, surrendered, obedient. It is very simple, Jesus says. The greatest people in the Kingdom are the ones who do what I tell them to do, nothing doubting. It is only when we get older that we begin to question everything. To enter this Kingdom we must know there is only room for one Head, for one Preeminence, for one King, for one Lord. We are disciples, not masters. We may struggle and question His dealings with us, but if we progress in the Way then one day we will learn the best course is to bow our heads and say, "Yes, Lord."

We are waiting for Jesus to give us grand instructions and commandments: "Go around the world and proclaim the Gospel full-time" or "Rise up and fulfill the ministry of an apostle" or "I have appointed you to be a prophet to the nations." But if we cannot hear and obey in the small things, how can we expect Him to lead us into greater things?

4. Unless you are perfectly righteous outwardly, and inwardly, you cannot enter.

"I tell you the truth, unless your righteousness is greater than the Pharisees and teachers of religious law, under no circumstances will you enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:20)."

We know from the Scriptures and from historical writings that the Pharisees were the strictest sect of Judaism. These people were zealously religious, even to the point of giving God a tenth of all their herds. It was the Pharisee who stood and prayed with himself, "I thank you God that I am not like the others... for I fast twice in the week and give a tenth of all my possessions." It was the Pharisees who had Jesus arrested and turned Him over to Pilate to be crucified - all the while thinking they were doing the right thing. Before meeting the Lord Jesus, Saul carried out their tradition as a member of this elite group and led a fanatical persecution against Christians thinking he was doing his duty to God. Looking back on his religious experiences, Paul said he was "blameless" insofar as the Law was concerned.

According to man's own standard, there is none more holy or righteous than a Pharisee. So when Jesus says a disciple of His must have a righteousness which surpasses the Pharisees, it is, for all intents and purposes, an impossible, idealistic goal. It would be like expecting everyone to have an athletic ability which surpasses Michael Jordan. We cannot even bring ourselves to the outward standard that the Pharisees represent, much less the perfection of an inward standard which Jesus says will characterize His followers.

It is amazing to see how many people, even today, try to please God in their own strength with outward works. They wear themselves out with church attendance, ministry, and giving. Unconsciously or not, they believe God will bless them because of their works. Consider a couple who told me they did not agree with what the church was doing with their money, but they continued to tithe anyway because they did not want to lose God's "blessing" on their finances. This is the logic of Pharisees blinded by their own self-righteousness. Such unwavering support of religious things would appear to be applauded by God, but Jesus says it counts for nothing insofar as the Kingdom is concerned.

Jesus leads us down an impossible path, and demands of us a righteousness that not only looks good outwardly, but looks good inwardly. Are you beginning to understand why few are able to follow this Way? The word translated "narrow" means "difficult to pass through because of many obstacles standing about". More and more I am finding that it is Jesus who puts these obstacles in front of us. And this is one of the biggest hurdles - how to have a righteousness that exceeds a Pharisee but does not turn me into a Pharisee. What a dilemma!

5. Apart from much tribulation, you cannot enter.

"[Paul and Barnabas] strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, "We must enter the Kingdom of God through much tribulation (Acts 14:22)."

This does not sound like something which would strengthen and encourage young disciples. If Paul and Barnabas brought this message to some churches they would not be invited back. Our idea of overcoming is to avoid tribulation, not pass through it. We certainly do not connect entering the Kingdom with going through tribulation. We think having the victory means eliminating all tribulation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In order to enter the Kingdom there must be an increase of Christ and a decrease of Self. This is an ongoing process, and by it we judge how far along the Path we have progressed. But how is Self decreased? We cannot do it by saying over and over, "I have to die. I have to decrease. I have to take up my cross." The more we try to decrease the more we are increased. Any attention we give to ourselves, even in an attempt to decrease ourselves, only serves to make us larger. So what is the answer? The answer is in our circumstances and trials. They are sufficient to decrease us. We need not do anything but wait for them to come, and see them as our opportunity to have Self decreased and Christ increased.

There are some who want the full-knowledge of Christ and want to advance along the narrow path. But they resist the dealings of God which are meant to push them farther along and deeper into Christ. On the one hand they want more of God, but on the other hand they do not want to experience what they must experience in order to see Him. Hence, they unnecessarily delay the work of the Cross. They find fault with their circumstances, murmur, complain, and resist every contrary thing. After ten, twenty, or thirty years of being dealt with they are still as stubborn and headstrong as ever.

Some have no depth in God because they have no depth of circumstances. Their life has been relatively easy. Even what we think are huge trials, Paul calls "light afflictions". Here is a man who has some depth of circumstances. The biographies of these men reveal they have had hard lives, both before and after knowing the Lord. If we desire ease and comfort then we will not have much depth. The Lord Jesus is "a Man of sorrows, and familiar with grief." It is better to agree with the Word of God, and realize that we cannot enter the Kingdom except through much tribulation. If we want to reign with Him, we must suffer with Him.

6. Unbelief and disobedience is enough to disqualify you.

"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief... some will enter that rest, but they to whom it was first preached did not enter in because of their disobedience (Hebrews 3:19; 4:6)."

The people referred to here are the Hebrews, most of whom died in the wilderness between Egypt, (representing the bondage of sin) and the Promised Land (representing the Kingdom of God). In First Corinthians 10:1-11, Paul says that they were ALL delivered, they ALL passed through the sea, they ALL ate the manna and ate the meat and drank the water from the Rock, Who is Christ. In spite of this they were not pleasing to God and they were destroyed in the wilderness. Twice we are told these things happened as an example to us. Why were they destroyed? Because of disobedience. They never lived out of all God had for them. They missed the fullness.

Upon hearing this message many become concerned about their relationship with God, and rightfully so. They have been taught that because God brought them out of Egypt, fed them manna, and gave them water that now they are set for life and can do as they please. Again, we are not questioning anyone's inward condition before God. There is no need to. Our own heart will either convince us or convict us. If we are in the Path we know it; and if we are not, inwardly we know that as well.

What we are endeavoring before God is to show His people that the issue of Life dwelling in us today is not based upon a confession that was made years, months, weeks, or days ago. It is not based on mighty works done in the Name of Jesus. It is not based on spiritual gifts or experiences. It certainly is not based on church membership or attendance. Life today is immediately and directly related to whether or not we are abiding in Christ! This abiding is a continual thing, and this continual abiding WILL (not might) result in fruitfulness. Without the fruit, we cannot claim to be abiding in Him at all.

The Hebrews' immediate concern was to get out of Egypt, but God's concern was getting them to enter the Promised Land. It was relatively simple to get them out of Egypt, but only two men out of several million of that first generation reached God's goal and crossed the Jordan. I think the problem is this: we have "going to heaven when we die" as the ultimate goal, and Christ has "entering the Kingdom of God" as the ultimate goal. Do we want to "just" go to heaven when we die, or do we want the preeminence of Christ expressed in "Your Kingdom come, Your Will be done, on earth [now] AS IT IS in heaven"? If we continue to preach an easy Gospel and bring sinners to an easy Jesus by having them pray an easy prayer then we are guilty of propagating another gospel, a false gospel, a Gate without a Path. Thank God for the Gate, but there is a Path, and neither of them are wide, and neither one of them are easy. But do we preach this?

7. The wealthy will find it virtually impossible to enter.

"Jesus looked around at His disciples, and said, 'How hard it is for those with riches to enter the Kingdom of God!' And the disciples were astonished at this saying. But Jesus repeated, 'Children, how difficult it is for those trusting in wealth to enter the Kingdom of God! I tell you the truth, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:23-25).'"

We have saved the best for last. It seems this rich young ruler came to Jesus as a model "seeker", having obeyed all the commandments from his childhood. If ever there was someone ready to walk the aisle, sign a decision card, or pray the Sinner's Prayer it was this man. He actually ran up to Jesus! Surely there is a future apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher in this one! At the very least he can use his wealth to help support Jesus Christ World Outreach Ministries, Inc. No soulwinner or fisher of men worth his salt would let this catch get away.

But instead of doing what we would do, Jesus pinpoints the very thing that is going to keep him from entering the Kingdom, and throws it up in front of Him as an obstacle to entering. As soon as the rich young ruler knows the cost, he turns away, grieving, and we never see or hear from him again. It is interesting that Jesus, even though He loved him, just watched him go. Does this sound like an easy Jesus? Does this sound like a soulwinner? What kind of fisher of men is this? What a contrast to the way we solicit converts every Sunday, with repeated altar calls and singing that hymn "just one more time" to give everyone an opportunity to come forward. Eventually, under such pressure, someone always does. But have they really counted the cost, or did we just make it sound too cheap? A cheap Gospel results in cheap disciples with no depth of root.

The Jews had been taught that material prosperity was a proof-positive sign of God's blessing (not too unlike some of the teaching we hear today). That is why Scripture records the shock and amazement of the disciples when Jesus announces that rich people will have a hard time entering the Kingdom. According to the way He words it we have to assume that it is well nigh impossible, more difficult than getting a camel to go through the eye of a needle. I have known some rich people, and I can affirm what Jesus says. It is most difficult for Him to have the preeminence over someone with great wealth. Even people of modest means can still be bound by riches, pursuing wealth or blessings, hoping to make it big one day. The pursuit of wealth is as dangerous as the accumulation of wealth.

The point is not that every disciple must be penniless. The point is that in this Kingdom, Christ alone has the preeminence, and you cannot serve two masters. Why are riches such a stumblingblock? It all relates to Self. For the rich man, Self is mostly represented in his riches. For the wise man, Self is mostly represented in his wisdom. For the good man, Self is mostly represented in his goodness. For the strong man, Self is mostly represented in his strength. YOU are your biggest obstacle to entering in. Why? Because there is no room in the Kingdom of God for Christ and Self. To leave the Kingdom of Self and enter the Kingdom of God is indeed a Narrow Path that few ever find.

#### WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?

"His disciples were astonished beyond measure, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men, it is impossible! But not with God; for with God all things are possible (Mark 10:26,27).'"

If you have endured everything said up to this point perhaps you are angry, confused, burdened, or amazed, just like the first disciples of Jesus, that entering the Kingdom is not as easy as you had at first thought. The Scriptures tell us that the Lord Jesus is "full of grace and truth." With Truth comes Grace, and

we will now conclude with how God accomplishes this impossible work by Grace.

Let us review all that is required of us in order to enter the Kingdom. We must be born again. In addition to saying, "Lord, Lord" we must actually do the Father's will. We have to humble ourselves like children. We should be more righteous than a Pharisee without becoming a hypocrite. We must endure tribulation joyfully. We ought never disobey or show lack of faith. We have to give up every vestige of Self, whatever we love the most, whether it be money, pride, natural wisdom, friends, family, position or status. On top of all this we are told that many will try to enter in but will not be able to. So the odds are against us already. Then Jesus says, "It is impossible with man." That eliminates self-effort altogether.

Some will say, "Oh yes, I can do all these things." Very well. My advice to those who think they can do it is: keep trying! Perhaps one day you will come to the end of yourself. But the rest of us already know better. The disciples, absolutely dumbfounded by this time, were beginning to question this among themselves: "Who in the world can be saved?" And Jesus frankly said, "It is impossible with man." Please note we are using "saved" in its ultimate intention of being established in the Kingdom of God, not merely going to heaven when we die, for that is the context in which it is used in this passage. Jesus says you cannot do it, I cannot do it, no human being can do this.

Where does God's grace begin? It begins with man's impossibility. It begins with "I cannot". It does NOT begin with "All these things have I done from my youth until now." As long as it is possible with man, there is no need for grace. We may be able to fulfill six out of seven things, or ninety-nine out of one hundred things, but when we meet Jesus on the grounds of self-effort there is always "one thing thou lackest." And this "one thing" is going to stop us dead in our tracks every single time, no matter how perfect we otherwise are. The Lord is waiting for us to know and to confess, "I cannot". For He can do what we cannot do; and He will do what we will not do! And once we allow Him, He brings us to where He wants us to be in a most remarkable manner.

"I am the Door [Gate]... by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9a)."

"So how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the Way [Path]'... (John 14:5,6ff)."

What is impossible with man is possible with God. Jesus is the Narrow Gate whereby we enter in and are saved. This much is obvious. So what is the Path? Is it being a good disciple? Is it fasting and prayer? Is it living a more holy life? Is it attending church or doing great works for God? Not at all. For Jesus tells us, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." The Narrow Gate is Christ, and the Narrow Path is Christ. This explains why the Gate and the Path are so narrow. There is no room for you at all. There is no room for self-effort. There is only room for Christ.

To enter the Kingdom is to lay down my life and live the Life of Another. The very thing which frustrates me is the answer to my problem: since I cannot do it, I have to depend upon the Life of Another to do what I cannot do. Hallelujah! I cannot enter again into my mother's womb and be born again, because I am too old; I cannot be faithful to do God's will at all times, because I am rebellious; I cannot humble myself and be like a child, because I am too proud; I cannot have a righteousness that is outwardly perfect and inwardly pure, because I am a hypocrite; I cannot endure tribulation with joy, because I love myself too much; I cannot find my way out of Egypt and into Canaan, because I am disobedient; I cannot just give away from everything I have worked for all my life, because I am selfish. I cannot, and you cannot, and no one can. This Gate and this Path is too narrow, too demanding. It is impossible.

Only one Man has perfectly fulfilled all these requirements - the Lord Jesus Christ - and this Man lives in me now. I thank God that what is impossible with me is easy achievable with Him! "As you have received the Lord Jesus Christ [Gate], so walk in Him [Path] (Colossians 2:6)." We come to the Lord admitting that we cannot save ourselves, and He does the saving. That is the Gate. Now we come to the Lord every day, admitting that we cannot enter the Kingdom, and He does what it takes to conform us into His image. That is the Path. Hence, I have no secret for the Christian Life, but Christ. I have no key, but Christ. I have no method, but Christ. I have no formula, but Christ. I have no technique, but Christ. I have no life, but Christ for it is no longer I that lives, it is Christ that lives in me (Galatians 2:20a). In Him, through Him, because of Him, by Him we may enter the Kingdom.

Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You that You are my Way, my Truth, and my Life! I praise You that I cannot save myself. I praise You that I cannot enter the Kingdom. As I trusted in You to bring me out of Egypt, so I trust in You to bring me into the Promised Land. As I have received You, so I will walk in You. You are my Narrow Gate, and You are my Narrow Path. As I am decreased, You are increased, and my life is exchanged for Your Life. I thank you, Lord, that through You we may enter the Kingdom. Amen.

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